

Application No.: 10/02,8659

Case No.: 57347US002

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following Listing of Claims will replace all prior listings of claims in the application:

1 – 8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for applying a splicing tape to a roll of sheet material, the apparatus comprising:

a plurality of sheet engagement mechanisms mechanism to lift an outer-most layer of the roll to form a lifted portion of the outer-most layer, wherein each sheet engagement mechanism includes a vacuum source and a roll sensor for sensing a spatial position of the roll relative to the sheet engagement mechanism, wherein each vacuum source only operates when a selected plurality of the roll sensors sense the roll;

a taping device to apply a slicing tape to the roll; and

a paper applicator to apply pressure to the lifted portion of the outer-most layer to progressively place the lifted portion of the outer-most layer in contact with the remainder of the roll and the splicing tape.

10. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the paper applicator applies pressure to disengage the lifted portion from the sheet engagement mechanism.

11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the paper applicator includes a roller for rolling along the lifted portion of the outer-most layer from the sheet engagement mechanism and to progressively press the roller along the outer-most layer and the splicing tape.

12. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, further comprising:  
a sheet cutter to cut the outer-most layer of the roll across a width thereof.

13. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the sheet engagement mechanism includes a vacuum source for lifting the portion of the outer-most layer away from the remainder of the roll.

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14. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the paper applicator holds down a portion of the outer-most layer as the lifted portion of the outer-most layer is lifted away from the remainder of the roll by the sheet engagement mechanism.

15. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the splicing tape has a first section and a second section, wherein the outer-most layer covers the first section of the splicing tape and the second section of the splicing tape remains exposed adjacent the outer-most layer.

16. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the taping device further includes a press down roller for pressing the outer-most layer against an outer surface of splicing tape after the paper applicator applies the lifted portion of the outer-most layer to the splicing tape.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 9 [[17]], wherein each sheet engagement mechanism includes a plurality of vacuum cups.

19 – 20. (Canceled)

21. (New) An apparatus for applying a splicing tape to a roll of sheet material, the apparatus comprising:

- a sheet engagement mechanism to lift an outer-most layer of the roll to form a lifted portion of the outer-most layer;

- a taping device to apply a splicing tape to the roll;

- a paper applicator to apply pressure to the lifted portion of the outer-most layer to progressively place the lifted portion of the outer-most layer in contact with the remainder of the roll and the splicing tape; and

- a press down roller for pressing the outer-most layer against an outer surface of splicing tape after the paper applicator applies the lifted portion of the outer-most layer to the splicing tape.